

Steele-  
Fowler House and Slave Quarters  
Near Huntsville, Alabama (2 miles from)  
Madison Co.

HABS No. 16-402

HABS  
ALA  
45-HUVI.V  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District No. 16

Historic American Buildings Survey  
E. Walter Burkhardt, District Officer  
Ala. Polytechnic Inst., Auburn, Ala.

Project #16-402  
GEORGE STEELE-FOWLER HOUSE  
McCollough Avenue  
Huntsville, Alabama

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HISTORICAL DATA:

Built in 1840.

Ownership:

George Steele bought the land in 1835. He built his home in 1840.

George W. Lane bought this home in 1883.

Several owners followed.

Present Occupants:

W. M. Fowler and family.

George Steele:

The son of George Steele, who fought under George Washington in the Revolutionary War, came to Alabama as a boy. His people were Virginians.

Married Eliza Ann Weaver, also of Virginian ancestry.

Studied architecture in New York. Practiced this profession in Huntsville. Also operated a brick kiln and a cotton factory.

Bought this beautiful, wooded land on the edge of Huntsville in 1835:

"The eastern half of the tract was wooded and reached some distance up the mountain side, possessing among its features a fine spring of clear water, from which a brook flowed to a creek in the field below.

"A wide brick pavement, curbed with limestone, surrounded the mansion and covered the square space in the angle formed by the annex. A walk led from the porch on the east to the fence--painted white like everything else on the place--which separated the yard from the grove. The circular driveway in front of the house came in from the road to the northwest.

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"Steele made a hobby of flowers and trees. His gardens contained beds of all kinds, while yellow jessamine, honeysuckle, clematis, climbing roses and many kinds of flowering shrubs were planted about the lawn and yard. Trees, numbering those from the original forest and others, including maple, cedar, pine, magnolia, dogwood, elm, ironwood and mimosa, towered above the house."

When Mr. Polk became President:

About the most interesting and magnificent celebration held in this home occurred the year Mr. Polk became President of the United States. A celebration had been planned four years previous, but upon the election of Martin Van Buren, with the defeat of the Democratic party, the entertainment had been called off. Nevertheless, a young ox was named "Van Buren".

Now, with the Democrats victorious, the party was held. Four thousand invitations were sent out:

"On a center table, beneath the oaks, stood a cake four feet high, topped by a figure of the president-elect, which had been hauled here by wagon from Nashville. Pigs, lambs, and the ox, "Van Buren", stuffed with turkeys, were barbecued. Jellies, sauces, bread, ice cream and cake were lavished upon the guests.

"Each man present, regardless of his station in life, received a cane cut from the hickory of Monte Sano, while the most prominent citizens were given similar gifts polished and capped with silver."

Civil War Period:

All four of George Steele's sons served in the War. At one time during this conflict, George Steele's widow (he had died in 1857) and one of his daughters, who had remained in their home, were ejected by the Yankees. This was the first time soldiers occupied the home.

General Joe Wheeler:

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General Joe Wheeler:

In 1898, following the Santiago campaign, when General Wheeler and his troops were camped at Huntsville, the General chose this house for his headquarters. This was the second time this home was occupied by soldiers.

Change:

Although the home has been little changed since George Steele built it, the yard, with its beautiful gardens, has disappeared. Only the fine old trees remain.

Source of Material:

Historic Homes, by Pat Jones, published in the Huntsville Times, March 19, 1933.

*Revised 1936 by H.C.F.*

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ARCHITECTURAL MERIT AND DATA:

This house, the plantation home of George Steele, architect and builder near Huntsville, is one of the unique buildings of the Tennessee Valley. It is situated on the top of a slight hill overlooking, what was at one time, a vast plantation acreage.

This house possesses considerable purity of design. The one story front portico entrance treatment and the window treatment on either side of this entrance feature are of excellent proportions and details. The balance of the exterior of this house does not come up to the excellence of these two motives. The rear of the house has most playful and unusual porch treatment, unusual in that it has a raised porch within a yard level porch. During ante-bellum days, the use of the double feature porch must have been colorful and of unusual appeal.

A supporting slave quarters, at present, are partially destroyed. The two still remaining have been converted into garage and store.

The interior of the house, however, is a unique contribution of the time, in that it is anything but a conventional Greek Revival Period plan.

The house was planned distinctly for the family and guests. Three levels make this possible. The lower level is devoted to receptions and banquets, with separate entrance; comprising a reception room and entrance hall, a banquet hall, and supporting slave kitchen. The principal entrance, originally, led into a spacious hall, to the right of which was the ball-room and to the left of which, up one-half a story, the living-room. On this raised intermediate story, to the left, is also located the family dining-room and supporting kitchen. Originally, a separate stairs went up to the upper story level leading to the men's guest room. Another stair led up to the family quarters and the women's guest rooms, a unique feature which should be noted, but which feature was destroyed during a subsequent alteration.

The interior detail shows nothing unusual, except for three landing level stairs which connect the three floors and some ceiling plaster work in the ball-room.

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The housing of the slave kitchen and additional family kitchen as part of the building scheme is one of the few instances where the kitchen is combined with the house. In the vast majority of these Southern homes, the kitchen is somewhat removed and independent of the house proper.

It is of record that masonry supporting structures were part of the scheme at one time, as follows: stables, carriage house, well house, ice house, dairy, hen house, overseer's cottage, and slave houses.

Source of Material:

E. Walter Burkhardt, District Administrator, HABS,  
Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

Pat Jones, Historic Homes, published in the Huntsville  
Times for March 19, 1933.

*Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.*